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Shooting From the Hip

After a succession of fumbling and amateur efforts to impersonate the late Joe McCarthy, Sen. Thomas E. Dodd has at last achieved success. Last Friday he called for a congressional investigation of the United States Information Agency and asked it to dismiss forthwith Ralph K. White, one of its Russian affairs specialists—all because Dr. White had expressed in a speech to the American Psychological Association some provocative ideas about the Soviet Union of which the Senator did not wholly approve.

Dr. White's principal thesis was that there exists a "mirror-image" relationship between Soviet thinking and American thinking—a relationship in which there are striking similarities except that "what was black-and-white in the American image system is white-and-black in the Soviet image-system, just as, in a mirror, what was left-and-right appears as right-and-left." He thinks that the misconceptions on either side constitute a danger and he urged his fellow-psychologists to cultivate an attitude "best characterized as tough-minded empathy, or empathic tough-mindedness . . . not a sneaking sympathy for the Communist cause but a realistic, imaginative understanding of how the whole world looks from a Communist point of view, as a preliminary to a critical dissection of that point of view."

Now, one may agree or disagree with this diagnosis. But surely it reflects an opinion clearly within the range of Dr. White's professional competence, clearly consistent with the aims of the agency in which he holds a responsible position,

and clearly reflective of devotion to the interests of the United States. Why, then, should Senator Dodd denounce it in so unbridled a way and say that if USIA leaders share White's approach, "this entire agency must be either cleaned up or dismantled."

We suggest a possible explanation—that the Senator never saw the speech itself but shot from the hip on hearing or reading an account of it. We rather think that if the Senator were to read the speech in its entirety with some care, he would find very little fault with it. For, in sober truth, it is an honest attempt to provide a measure of that realism which, as Dr. White says, we desperately need "if we are to win either our ideological battle against communism or the joint battle that we and the Communists are waging against mutual suicide."

In his illuminating study of the relations between Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin, George Kennan concludes that the misunderstandings and errors of judgment at the end of World War I resulted in large part from "the inadequacy of the information at the disposal of the Allied governments." He offered an astute observation:

"Sometimes I think it might be made a maxim of democratic statesmanship in difficult situations to seek its information, however distasteful this might be, from the study of its enemies rather than from the consultation of its friends."